

**Press release**

## **Infamous NGO Committee excludes human rights defenders from the UN**

*For the 18<sup>th</sup> time since 2008, the Committee on NGOs has deferred IDSN's application – the longest pending one of its kind - for UN ECOSOC consultative status. Two more questions from India has yet again delayed the process.*

COPENHAGEN, 1 JUNE --- The UN Committee on NGOs has become infamous as a tool of states that do not respect human rights and civil society. The Committee's practice of repeatedly deferring NGO applications for consultative status with the UN has reached such an alarming extent that it undermines global human rights, the International Dalit Solidarity Network said today.

At its ongoing session in New York, the Committee on NGOs has yet again effectively blocked a number of NGOs from gaining access to the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Last week, 230 NGOs took the unprecedented step of calling for reforms of the way that the UN deals with NGOs. In a joint letter to ECOSOC member states, they described the practice of the Committee as "reflective of growing restrictions on civil society globally".

The UN Special Rapporteur on the exercise of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai, joined this criticism by stating that the Committee on NGOs has been "hijacked" by governments that aim to "take away NGOs' voices on the international stage" by "arbitrarily deferring applications for consultative status." He urged the Committee to stop "pandering to considerations that undermine the ability of the United Nations to fulfill its mission."

The most extreme case of obstruction against NGOs is that of the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), which started its application process nine years ago. Yesterday, the Committee deferred the application for the 18<sup>th</sup> time, as India presented two more questions to IDSN. Since 2008, India has asked 77 questions, many of them repetitive and previously responded to. Maina Kiai has described these actions as "clearly unacceptable, wrong and unfair."

The deferral means that IDSN and its members, many of whom are human rights defenders from caste-affected countries, are effectively barred from associating freely with the UN. Without ECOSOC status, NGOs cannot present statements or organise side events at UN fora. This means a loss of opportunities to discuss the horrific human rights violations caused by caste discrimination.

During the session of the Committee on NGOs, India accused IDSN of globalising local issues by taking them to the UN and argued that its 'sensitivities' cannot be discussed in UN multilateral fora. IDSN strongly disagrees with this point-of-view, as caste discrimination is undisputedly a global human rights issue.

"India's harassment of IDSN is part of global trend which in India itself has led to an increasingly shrinking space for human rights defenders. Furthermore, India acts against the interests of its 200 million Dalits. By blocking discussions on caste discrimination in international fora, it effectively lets down one sixth of its own population and also harms the aspirations for a better life for tens of millions of people subjected to caste discrimination in other countries," IDSN's Executive Director, Rikke Nöhrind, said.

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**More information:**

[Commentary on the UN Committee on NGOs by Special Rapporteur Maina Kiai](#)

[UN Special Rapporteur condemns practice of UN NGO Committee](#) (ISHR News)

[IDSN cited as example of obstruction against NGOs](#) (IDSN news)

[Open Letter to ECOSOC regarding the Committee on NGOs](#)

[Unprecedented call in defence of freedom of association at the UN](#) (ISHR news)

[ISHR statement to ECOSOC Committee on NGOs – 24 May 2016](#)

[Facts about IDSN's ECOSOC application](#)

[HRW urges India to stop treating critics as criminals](#) (IDSN news)

[Govt of India "blocking" international Dalit network to freely associate with UN](#) (Counterinterview)